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National reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development

Note by the Secretary-General

1. Subsequent to the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, activities related to national reporting have focused on four elements: (a) facilitating national reporting to the seventh session of the Commission; (b) preparation of an analytical report of national information on the sustainable development of oceans and seas; (c) maintenance and updating of the United Nations system-wide sustainable development Web site; and (d) early preparations to facilitate reporting to the Commission at its eighth session.

National reporting to the Commission at its seventh session

2. In the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (General Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex), it was stated, in paragraph 115, that national reports on the implementation of Agenda 21 have proved to be a valuable means of sharing information at the international and regional levels and, even more important, of providing a focus for the coordination of issues related to sustainable development at the national level within individual countries, and accordingly, in paragraph 133 (b), that national reporting should continue through voluntary national communications or reports.

3. Consistent with the agenda established in the Commission's multi-year programme of work, guidelines for national reporting were prepared by the Secretariat on the following issues: (a) changing production and consumption patterns; (b) oceans and seas; and (c) sustainable tourism. The guidelines were sent by mail and where possible by electronic mail to the respective permanent representatives to the United Nations in New York and to the focal points of all countries at the end of August 1998, in English only. The French translation was available in October 1998, the Spanish translation in November 1998. The deadline requested was November 1998. However, for countries replying in French and Spanish the deadline necessarily had to be extended.

4. By mid-March 1999, reports had been received from the following 43 countries: Australia, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Iceland, Iraq, Ireland, Japan, Lebanon, Lithuania, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Paraguay, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Uzbekistan and Yugoslavia.

Analytical report on oceans and seas

5. In its decision 6/5, the Commission expressed its appreciation for the efforts made by the Secretariat in

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compiling and updating the information provided by countries on the implementation of Agenda 21. Emphasizing the importance of taking full advantage of the information contained in the national reports, the Commission requested the Secretariat to process and compile, on a sectoral basis, the information provided by Governments.

6. In response to that request, the Secretariat prepared a report for the seventh session of the Commission on trends in national implementation with respect to the sustainable development of oceans and seas (E/CN.17/1999/4/Add.1).

United Nations system-wide sustainable development Web site

7. As reported at earlier sessions, the United Nations system-wide sustainable development Web site (at <http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/>) contains the information provided by Governments in their national reports to the Commission, on a country-by-country and issue-by-issue basis. The Secretariat continues to update the Web site with new information as it is submitted by Governments.

8. New information is generally transmitted to the Secretariat through national reports. However, Governments are invited to submit new information at any time on any of the issues of concern to the Commission on Sustainable Development, and this information will also be used to update the Web site as well as to inform the analytical reports requested of the Secretary-General.

National reporting to the Commission at its eighth session

9. In its decision 6/5, the Commission took note of the concern expressed in the report of the Secretary-General on national reporting to the Commission (E/CN.17/1998/8) regarding the timeliness with which national reports are requested and submitted. It is understood that the preparation of national reports involves comprehensive reviews at the national level, with multi-stakeholder dialogues and inputs. For that reason, the process of reporting, while invaluable to national policy-making and planning, is also time-consuming.

10. Consequently, the Secretariat has revised its schedule for preparation of the guidelines for the eighth session of the Commission. These guidelines, which will refer to reporting on (a) integrated planning and management of land resources, (b) financial resources, trade and investment and economic growth, and (c) agriculture (including forestry), should be transmitted to Governments by early June 1999 in English, and by the end of July 1999 in Spanish and French.

11. The deadline requested for submitting national reports to the Secretariat will be the end of October 1999. Should national information be available by that date, it will have a greater impact on the inter-sessional preparations for the eighth session of the Commission as well as on the respective analytical reports of the Secretary-General.